

Cove Presbyterian Church
East side, U. S. Rt. 29
Covesville
Albemarle County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-982

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

COVE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

HABS No. VA-982

Location: East side, U.S. Rt. 29, Covesville,
Albemarle County, Virginia.

Present Owner: Trustees of Cove Church.

Present Occupant: Cove Presbyterian Church.

Present Use: Church.

Significance: The small, brick church is a good
example of the early (1809) Gothic
revival; particularized by its
gabled roof, pointed-arched windows,
and American bond, three-course
red brick.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The following is a listing of recorded land transfers concerning the Cove Church property. The original deed, or a subsequent deed reference, was not found in the Albemarle County records, and, thus, the deed could have been recorded prior to 1754 in the Goochland County Courthouse. The building and its site along with other land holdings have been held by the Trustees of Cove Church throughout the building's known history.

The earliest reference to the Cove Church property was found in deed book 78-pg. 302, 1880; summarized in the tax records as "Whereas Addison Gentry agreed to sell in 1844 a parcel of land near Cove Church and bounded by church lot on North, stage road of West, and on South by a new line leaving the road S62 1/2° E21.6 p to pointers in D.E. Watson's old line and with him to the begin 1 1/2 A more or less." This was the neighboring parcel upon which the male and Female Academy was established in the 1880's.

In 1884 and 1888, the Cove trustees purchased from John N. Jones, and subsequently his widow (d.b. 90-p.417), the 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ acres hitherto known as the Old Parsonage Lot. J.J. Boaz completed in 1918 a transaction started by E.D. Boaz before his death in which three strips of land, totaling 3.62 acres around the church lot, were to be traded for the Old Parsonage lot. The final deed recorded in 1918 is listed in d.b. 168-p.334. The first of these pieces, one acre, went back to 1885, d.b. 80-p.104; was halved by d.b. 142-p.446 and was mentioned in the complete transaction as being from d.b. 132-p.474. A second parcel was listed as only a strip of land between the church and the now-Southern Railway right of way. The third parcel consisted of $2\frac{5}{8}$ acres previously owned by Boaz and listed in d.b. 126-p.75. These were the only early land transactions of which the Cove Trustees were a part. Later deeds concern the acquisition of right of ways by the Commonwealth of Virginia, d.b. 201-p.412, .67 acres, and, most recently, the Virginia State Highway Department in 1969, d.b. 457-p.475, .63 acres. The church lot now consists of 3.49 acres, but the Trustees also own .89 acres (county map #109-21) upon which they built a manse in 1964.

2. Date of erection: 1809
3. Alterations and additions: An early blueprint of the floor plan of the church confirms physical evidence of many alterations between the 1809 structure and that of the present. At least prior to the Civil War, there were three doors on the front of the building where there is now one center door and two mortar-infilled windows. Also, there were two stairways on the outside of the rear wall which led to the upper U-shape gallery for slaves. Perhaps similar to those found on the Scottsville Presbyterian Church of the same period. According to the beam structure under the flooring as well as cuts in the balcony and floor boards, the gallery was at least 10'5" wide along both walls.

On the 12th of June in 1880, a tornado went through the area of Coveseville and damaged the

church. According to changes in mortar and brick coursing, the roof was torn off, and the front and back walls collapsed approximately above the height of the side walls. The 1880 reconstruction eliminated the gallery to leave only a back balcony. The rear slave entrances were obliterated with the gallery leaving only a change in mortar and four pieces of wood, 5'9"--10'6"--25'6"--30'5" from the right of the rear wall. A foyer was created by a single-board thick wall 5'6" in from the front wall. Perhaps it was at this time the two side doors were eliminated and filled in on the lower 3' to form the existing mortar-infilled windows.

Several Victorian period features were added at this time. These include the added wooden decorative arches on the ceiling as well as an ornamental cornice piece on the four corners of the exterior roof line. Tie rods were used in the reconstruction and are seen as black plates on the elevations; one on the rear, two on the other three sides. Evidence of shutter hinges along the window molding and shutter stops 1'10" out from the exterior ledge indicate shutters were used prior to the earliest found photograph of the church from 1927 in which there were no shutters.

In the 1930's, the kerosene lamps were replaced with electric lamps suspended from the tie rods. The church also added onto its right chimney for added height for a coal furnace. At this time a small "cellar" room was dug out on the right side of the building to house the furnace. Other than the addition of an air conditioning unit, these are all the alterations from the original structure.

B. Historical Events and Persons Relevant to the Church:

The early history of the Cove Presbytery begins at least 40 years before the brick church was built. But relevant to its founding is the migration over the Blue Ridge of Scotch-Irish Presbyterians led by Rev. Samuel Black to this particular region of Virginia. Albemarle County issued its first call "dated Ivy Creek, March 29, 1747." The Cove Presbytery was founded in 1769 in a log structure

meeting house. From page 2 of the "History of the Cove Church at Covesville, Virginia" article; "Whether the log church or Cove meeting house, as it is termed in the old records, stood where the present brick church stands is not known. The impression is that the log church stood near where Mr. Sidney Barnett now lives. A log barn now standing on the site of the late Dr. W.D. Boaz was built from the logs of the old church." K. Edward Lay, Assistant Dean of the University of Virginia School of Architecture, has stated that he believes the several rows of boxwoods between Rt. 29 and the rear of the brick church indicate a clearing where the old log church could have been.

Of note are two of the earliest pastors of the church and their impact upon the community. The third minister of Cove Church, Rev. James Robinson, became the librarian of the Cove Librarian Society, founded May 22, 1801, and met at the "Cove Meeting House" until 1828. Rev. Robinson was also reprimanded for teaching slaves in the church in 1818, although there were two slaves recorded in his later estate. The Rev. William Pinkerton was elected pastor of the church in 1842. He also ran a Male Academy "in a brick structure just south of the church" for the neighborhood children and several boarders. He closed the school between 1851 and 1852. Thus, Cove Church can be seen as an integral part of the Covesville community, and the region as a whole, in the early years of its founding.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Records of the Cove Church, Manuscripts #4740, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.
2. "History of the Cove Church at Covesville, Virginia," From the Home Mission Messenger of West Hanover Presbytery, Charlottesville, Virginia, Sept. 1927, no author indicated, Manuscripts #959, Alderman Library.
3. Blueprint of Cove Church Floor Plan, Cove Presbyterian Church collection, Manuscripts #38-501, Alderman Library.
4. Albemarle County in Virginia; Rev. Edgar Woods, C.F. Carrier Co., Harrisonburg, Va., 1972. (orig. 1900).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The building is a good example of Virginia's early brick churches of the 17th century.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Summary Description:

The building is a simple rectangle, with one main room, a small foyer, bounded by stairs to the left and a closet to the right, with a balcony above. In the proximity of the building is a secondary building known as Cove Hall and an abandoned cemetery.

C. Description of Exterior:

1. Foundations: Stone, roughly $3\frac{1}{2}'$ deep and 1' wide flush with the brick wall above.
2. Wall construction: Red brick, originally all three course American bond, now some five and seven course as well.
3. Structural system: Masonry bearing walls, wood interior framing and floors, original beams $10" \times 9\frac{1}{2}"$, joists $4\frac{1}{2}" \times 3\frac{3}{4}"$, joist spacing $2'1\frac{1}{2}"$ c. to c.
4. Chimneys: Two, only the right is in use, constructed of brick.
5. Openings:
 - a. doorways and doors: central door as the main entrance, panelled.
 - b. windows: pointed arch windows, double-hung.
6. Roof:
 - a. shape, covering: gable with standing seam tin roofing
 - b. cornice, eaves: half-round moldings, Victorian decorative motif on corners.

D. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans:

- a. basement: small cellar for furnace, rest is crawl space.
 - b. main floor: central entrance into a foyer from which two doorways open into the main two-aisled room, to the left of the foyer are stairs to the balcony, to the right is a small closet, altar and pedestal are central with pews perpendicular to the main body of pews on either side.
 - c. balcony: floor and 2' high railing angle back into the wall.
 - d. attic: small trap door above the balcony leads to a possible, but likely very narrow attic space.
2. Stairways: Crude, narrow stairs lead to the balcony, no handrail.
 3. Flooring: Wide, hardwood flooring has been covered by carpet on the aisles, altar, and foyer.
 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Painted plaster.
 5. Doorways and doors: Panelled doors from the foyer are thin with simple detailing.
 6. Trim: Rounded edge chair rail becomes the window ledge at the window opening, stops at the altar and foyer partition.
 7. Lighting: Pewter lamps hung from the tie rods.
 8. Heating: Furnace.

E. Site:

1. General setting: The building entrance faces a mountain to the east. A railroad borders that side of the property. A cemetery consisting of several small, individual family plots lies between the railroad and the church driveway. The church itself sits on a small knoll with a state road cut 15' behind the rear wall. Beyond this road lies the rows of boxwoods. An old schoolhouse lies about 150' to the left of the church. The Cove Hall, 30'x50' is to the right of the church on the opposite side of the driveway.

2. Historic landscape design: No indication was found of an altered landscape around the church. The most significant aspect of the area was the boxwoods to the rear of the church. The trees and boxwoods form a definable clearing--including an entry. However, neither the size of the trees or of the boxwoods indicate they were there as early as 1770.
3. Outbuildings: Brick, two-story Cove Hall built in 1968 with architectural features similar to the church.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This material is part of a project undertaken by the University of Virginia, School of Architecture, under the direction of K. Edward Lay, Associate Professor of Architecture. The records were prepared by M. Tabb Lynn and Charles M. Watts during the Fall Semester, 1978. The documentation was donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey. It was not prepared under HABS supervision, nor edited by members of the HABS staff.